The King In Yellow

An Entertainment

Dramatis Personae

CASSILDA	A Queen
UOHT	A Prince
CAMILLA	A Princess
THALE	A Prince
the CHILD	A clockwork masterpiece
NOATALBA	A High Priest
the STRANGER	A Harbinger
the KING	A Living God

Act 1

(A balcony of the palace in Hastur, overlooking the Lake of Hali, which stretches to the horizon, blank, motionless and covered with a thin haze. The two suns sink towards the rippleless surface).

(The fittings of the balcony are opulent, but dingy with time. Several stones have fallen from the masonry, and lie unheeded).

(CASSILDA, a Queen, lies on a couch overlooking the Lake, turning in her lap a golden diadem set with jewels. A servant enters and offers her a tray, but it is nearly empty: some bread, a jug. She looks at it hopelessly and waves it away. The servant goes out.

(Enter PRINCE UOHT, a portly man in his early millions.)

UOHT: Good day, mother.

CASSILDA: Good-bye, day.

UOHT: You have been looking at Carcosa again.

CASSILDA: No… Nobody can see Carcosa before the Hyades rise. I was only looking at the Lake of Hali. It swallows so many suns.

UOHT: And you will see it swallow so many more. These mists are bad for you; they seep into everything. Come inside.

CASSILDA: No, not now. I do not fear a little mist; nor a little time. I have seen quite a lot of both.

UOHT: This interminable siege! Would that the lake would swallow Alar for once, instead of the suns.

CASSILDA: Not even Hali can do that, since Alar sits upon Dehme, which is quite another lake.

UOHT: One lake is like another: water and fog, fog and water. If Hastur and Alar changed sites between moons, nobody would notice. They are the two worst situated cities in the world.

CASSILDA: Necessarily, since they are the only ones.

UOHT: Except Carcosa. … Well?

CASSILDA: I am not sure, my Prince, that Carcosa is in the world. In any event, it is certainly fruitless to talk about the matter.

(CAMILLA, a Princess, enters, then hesitates.)

CAMILLA: Oh. I—

CASSILDA: Come ahead, Camilla, hear us. There are no secrets any longer. Everything has been worn thin, and Time has stopped.

(Enter THALE, the younger Prince.)

THALE: Nonsense again, mother?

CASSILDA: If it pleases you to call it that, Prince Thale. As for me, I am only a Queen; I can be mocked at will.

THALE: But no, I didn't mean—

UOHT: Mockery or no, Prince Thale is right. Time does not stop. It is a contradiction in terms.

CASSILDA: Time stops, my Uoht, when you have heard every possible banality every possible number of times. Whenever has anything happened in Hastur, please? Any new word, or any new event? The siege, as you very justly and repeatedly observe, is right flat-out interminable, and that's that. Neither Hastur nor Alar will ever prevail. We shall both just wear down into dust – or boredom, whichever arrives first. Ah, I am sorry for you, Uoht, but I'm afraid you only remind me now that there's no future in being human. Even as a baby, you were a little dull.

UOHT: You may say what you please of me, too, for royalty of course has its privileges. All the same, not all time is in the past, Cassilda. It lies in your power to change things, were you not so weary of us – and of yourself.

CASSILDA: Oh, are we to talk of the Succession again? Nothing is duller than dynasties. Here, then, let us set ourselves upon the only mission left: to die when we are to die, to scream when one is to scream, as expected. To go into those darker places and say to the feast of reason: No more, I have had my fill.

THALE: Mother, must the Dynasty die only because you are bored? Only a word from you, and the Black Stars would rise again. Whatever your soothsaying, Alar could not stand against them; you know that. It would be— it would be an act of mercy, to the people.

CASSILDA: The people! Who are they? You care as little for the people as Uoht does. Thale, I know your heart, and his as well. All the diadem means to either of you is your sister. There’s no other reward now for being a king in Hastur. As for black stars, enough! They radiate nothing but the night.

THALE: Camilla loves me.

UOHT: Liar!

CASSILDA: Camilla?

UOHT: Ask her, if you dare.

THALE: Who would dare, without the diadem? You're not so bold, Uoht. Have *you* found the Yellow Sign?

UOHT: Hold your tongue!

CASSILDA: And stop your bickering, you two frogs! … *I* will ask her.

CAMILLA: I am not ready to be asked, Mother.

CASSILDA: No? Camilla, *you* could have the diadem. Then you could have your pick of your brothers, and we'd have an end to all our problems. See how I tempt you. The Dynasty would go on, and you'd be free of all this conniving. Perhaps, even, the siege would end. … Well, Camilla, speak!

CAMILLA: No, no. Please. You cannot give the diadem to me. I will not have it.

CASSILDA: And why not?

CAMILLA: Then *I* would be sent the Yellow Sign.

CASSILDA: Possibly, if one can believe the runes. But would that be so very terrible? Tell us, Camilla, what, after all, does happen when one receives the Yellow Sign?

CAMILLA *(whispering)*: One—one is come for.

CASSILDA: So they say. I have never seen it happen. But suppose it does. Who comes for them?

CAMILLA: The Phantom of Truth.

CASSILDA: And what is that?

CAMILLA: Please, I do not know.

CASSILDA: No more do I. But suppose, Camilla, whatever it is, that perhaps it's real. What then? Does it frighten you?

CAMILLA: Yes, Mother.

CASSILDA: A shame. If that's the case, then I shall give the diadem to one of your brothers, and end this steamy botheration in some other way. You have only to choose between them, as they ask. I would be delighted to give you a marriage in the

utmost of state. At the very least, it would be a novelty, in a small and noisy way.

UOHT: A wise decision.

THALE: And not a small one, Mother.

CAMILLA: But Mother, there *is* something new; we do not need a stately wedding yet. That's what I came to tell you, just before the old quarrel started up again.

CASSILDA: And what is that?

CAMILLA: Mother, there's a stranger in the city.

CASSILDA: A stranger! Now living god, hear that. You have all the mists of Hali in your brains. I know every face in Hastur, and in Alar, too. Camilla, how many people do you think there are remaining in the living world? A spate of handfuls, and I've seen them all.

CAMILLA: This one is new in Hastur. And how can you be so certain we are the only handful left? Strangers could be out there. Strange places. What impossible landscapes wait for us beyond the corners of this cracked world?

CASSILDA: Nobody these days goes about Hastur but the hearse-driver. Sensible people hide their faces even from themselves.

CAMILLA: But that’s it. You can’t see his face. He’s walking masked.

CASSILDA: Oh, covered with a veil? Or is he hooded?

CAMILLA: Neither, Mother. He wears another face. A white mask—whiter than the mists. The eyes are blank, and it has no expression.

CASSILDA: Hmm… In all conscience, strange enough. How does he explain it?

CAMILLA: He speaks to no one.

CASSILDA: I will see him. He will speak to me. Everyone does; and then he’ll be unmasked.

UOHT: But Mother, this is only a conceit. It is of no moment in the tree of time. If Camilla will but choose—

THALE: And bring back the Succession—

CASSILDA *(placing the diadem upon her head)*: We will talk of this some other time. Send me now

Noatalba, and the man in the pallid mask. Camilla does not wish to choose now, and no more do I.

UOHT: Time is running out. There has been no king in Hastur since the last Aldones—

CASSILDA: Do not tell me again the story of the Last King! Oh, I am so sick, so sick of you all! I tell you now, if you goad me further, there will be no other king in Hastur till the King in Yellow!

(There is a long, shocked silence. CAMILLA, UOHT, and THALE go out, stunned and submissive. CASSILDA lies back, exhausted and brooding.

(Enter a CLOCKWORK CHILD with jeweled fingers, wearing a small duplicate of the diadem.)

CHILD *(in a tinkling, pleasant voice like a music box)*: Tell me a story.

CASSILDA: Not now.

CHILD: Please, tell me a story. Please.

CASSILDA: I do not feel like telling you a story now.

CHILD *(menacingly)*: Grandmother?

(CASSILDA sits up resignedly. She does not look at the CHILD.)

CASSILDA: Once upon a time…

CHILD: That’s better.

CASSILDA: … there were two lakes in the heart of Gondwanaland, called Dehme and Hali. For millions of years they lay there with no-one to see them, while strange fishes bit their surfaces. Then, there appeared a city by the lake of Hali—

(During the course of this scene, the twin suns set. Across the water, the Hyades come out, slightly blurred by the mists.)

CHILD: That’s not a story, that’s only history.

CASSILDA: It is the only story that there is. Besides, if you’ll be quiet, I shall tell you the rest that’s in the runes. Is that agreed?

CHILD: Oh good! I’m not supposed to know about what’s in the runes.

CASSILDA: That doesn’t matter now. But to go on: This city had four singularities. The first singularity was that it appeared overnight. The second singularity was that one could not tell whether the city sat upon the waters, or beyond them on the invisible other shore. The third singularity was that when the moon rose, the towers of the city

appeared to be behind it, not in front of it. Shall I go on?

CHILD: Of course, I know all the rest.

CASSILDA: Unfortunate child. Well then, the fourth singularity was that as soon as one looked upon the city, one knew what its name was.

CHILD: Carcosa.

CASSILDA: Even as today. And after a long time, men came to the lakes and built mud huts. The huts grew into the city of Hastur and soon a man arose who proclaimed himself king in Hastur.

CHILD: Aldones. My grandfather.

CASSILDA: Yes, some epochs back. And he declared that all the kings in Hastur thereafter should bear his name. He promised that if his Dynasty be maintained, then someday Hastur would be as great as Carcosa across the waters.

CHILD: Thank you, that’s enough.

CASSILDA: No, that is not enough. That night someone heard him. You have asked, and must hear the end.

CHILD: I have to leave now. I forgot something.

CASSILDA *(her eyes closed)*: You must listen, Child: That same night, Aldones found the Yellow Sign.

(The CHILD runs out.

(CASSILDA opens her eyes and resumes watching across the Lake. A page enters with a torch, fixes it in a sconce, and goes out again. CASSILDA does not stir.

(In the near darkness, NOATALBA, a priest, enters.)

NOATALBA: My Queen.

CASSILDA: My Priest.

NOATALBA: You forgot the fifth singularity.

CASSILDA: And you are an incurable dropper of eaves. I am not surprised. In any event, one does not mention the Mystery of the Hyades to a child.

NOATALBA: No. But you think of it, my Queen. You are wise to do so. Ah, but we are each a prison, not a prisoner: time makes prisons of us all. Inside each a thousand still voices are trapped, that if freed might fill this world with whispers of fear.

CASSILDA: No, I don’t think of it. Everyone today imputes philosophy to me, but I’m not so

thoughtful. It is only that the shadows of men’s thoughts lengthen commonly in the afternoon. Dusk is dusk.

NOATALBA: Long thoughts cast long shadows at any time of day.

CASSILDA: And no news is good news. Noatalba, must you wash me clean with banalities too? Next, you will be speaking of the Succession.

NOATALBA: As a matter of fact, nothing was farther from my mind.

CASSILDA: A good place for nothing.

NOATALBA: I am pleased to hear you jesting. Nonetheless, I have something else to ask you.

CASSILDA: The man in the pallid mask?

NOATALBA: You have heard. Good. Then I will be brief.

CASSILDA: Good.

NOATALBA: I think you should not see him.

CASSILDA: What?! Nothing will prevent me! Do you think I will refuse the only novelty in human history, such as it is? You know me little.

NOATALBA: I know you better than you know yourself.

CASSILDA: You tire me with your word games. Why should I not see this man?

NOATALBA: It is by no means certain that he is a man. And if he is, then at best he is a spy from Alar.

(There is a very long silence, as if something had interrupted the action; both CASSILDA and NOATALBA remain absolutely immovable throughout it. Then their dialogue resumes, as if both were quite unaware of the break.)

CASSILDA: A poor spy then, to be so conspicuous. And in any event, poor priest, what is there that Alar does not know about us? That is why we are in this impasse in the war: We know everything. Were one stone to fall in Alar that I did not hear about, the war would be over; and Aldones, poor man, is trapped in the same whale. But he knows me, and I know him, and that’s the end of the matter. We shall die of this glut of familiarity, he and I, lying in the same tomb, measuring away at each other’s hair and fingernails in the hope of some advantage even in death. Why would he send a spy? He is the

father of my tiresome children, and the architect of my miserable city. Oh, Noatalba, how I wish I could tell him something he does not know! He would die of joy, and Alar would sink into the Lakes—Hastur thereafter!

NOATALBA: Perhaps. You think more highly of novelty than I do; it is a weakness in you. But I myself do not think this creature in the pallid mask to be a spy. You are surprised? But no; I only said of that possibility: “At best.”

CASSILDA *(with a short chopping gesture)*: Alright, I yield you that. The worst, then?

NOATALBA: This thing may be the Phantom of Truth. Only ghosts go about in white. Eyes turned inward, in the dark, a phantom watches an idea of us. We are trapped by that gaze, like insects frozen in amber… My Queen, I fear we are toys in the hands of a monster, and nothing else besides. From babe’s first mewling to last extremity, the King watches, eyes empty like a newly polished sepulcher, expression indifferent as time.

CASSILDA *(slowly)*: Oh. Oh. Is that moment come? I see. Then I was wise to abort the Dynasty, after all.

I am not often wise. But perhaps any end is a good end… if it is truly an end. But… Noatalba–

NOATALBA: Speak.

CASSILDA: I have not found the sign.

NOATALBA *(indulgently)*: Of course not, or you would have told me. But we cannot be sure that the Sign is always sent. The sender—

(He falls silent. CASSILDA, perceiving that she has the upper hand again, grins mercilessly.)

CASSILDA: —is the King in Yellow.

NOATALBA: Well—yes. The King warns, as he has warned the first Aldones. We know nothing about him but that. And should not know.

CASSILDA: Why not? Perhaps he is dead.

(NOATALBA abruptly hides his face at her words, in obeisance and dismay. She continues despite his protestations)

Or perhaps too busy with his own affairs in Carcosa, so that he has forgotten to send the Sign. Why not? We are well taught that with the King in Yellow, all things are possible.

NOATALBA *(unmasking his face slowly)*: I have not heard you. You did not speak.

CASSILDA: I only spoke to your point, my Priest—that this man in the pallid mask may indeed be the Phantom of Truth, though I have not found the Sign, no more than you. That was what you were saying, was it not? Be silent if you wish. Well, I'll chance it.

NOATALBA: Blasphemy!

CASSILDA: Is the King a god? I think not. In the meantime, Noatalba, I would dearly love to see the face of Truth. It must be curious. I feel as though I have met every other ghost that remains in the world; send me this man, phantom or no!

(Exit NOATALBA.

(The STRANGER enters. He is wearing a silken robe on which the Yellow Sign is embroidered: a single character in no human script, in gold against a circular background. CASSILDA turns to look at him, and then with a quick and violent motion, plucks the torch from its sconce and hurls it from the balcony into the Lake. Now there is only starlight, and some faint scattered lights in the distance from the bombed ruins of Hastur.)

CASSILDA: I have not seen you! I have not seen you!

STRANGER: You echo your priest. You are all blind and deaf—obviously by choice.

CASSILDA: I … suppose it is too late to be afraid. Well then; I am not.

STRANGER: Well spoken, Queen. There is in fact nothing to be afraid of.

CASSILDA: Please, phantom, no nonsense. You wear the Sign.

STRANGER: How do you know that? You have never seen the Yellow Sign.

CASSILDA: Oh I know. The Sign is in the blood. That is why I aborted the Dynasty. No blood should have to carry such knowledge through a human heart; no children’s teeth so set on edge.

STRANGER: You face facts. That is a good beginning. Very well, then; yes, in fact, this is the Sign. Nevertheless, Cassilda—

CASSILDA: “Your Majesty”—

STRANGER: —*Cassilda*, there is nothing to fear. You see how I wear it with impunity. Be reassured; it has no power left.

CASSILDA: Is that… a truth?

STRANGER: It is the shadow cast by a truth. Nothing else is ever vouchsafed us, Queen. That is why I am dressed in all white: in order to survive such twisting and variegated shadows. And the Pallid Mask protects me—as it will protect you.

CASSILDA: How?

STRANGER: It deceives. That is the function of a mask. What else?

CASSILDA: You are not very full of straight answers.

STRANGER: There are no straight answers. But I tell you this: Anyone who wears the Pallid Mask need never fear the Yellow Sign. You tremble. All the same, my Queen, that era is over. Whatever else could you need to know? Now your Dynasty can start again; again there can be a King in Hastur; and again, Cassilda, the Black Stars can mount the sky once more against the Hyades. The

siege can be lifted. Humankind can have its future back.

CASSILDA *(murmuring)*: So many dreams!

STRANGER: Only wear the Mask, and these are given. There's no other thing required of us.

CASSILDA: Who tells me this?

STRANGER: I am called Yhtill.

CASSILDA: That is only Alaran for "stranger."

STRANGER: And "Aldones" is only Hasturic for "father." What of it?

CASSILDA: Your facts are bitterer than your mysteries. And what will happen to you, Yhtill, you with the Yellow Sign upon your bosom, when the Sign is sent for?

STRANGER: Nothing at all. What has Carcosa ever had to do with the human world, since you all lived in mud huts? The King in Yellow has other concerns, as is only super-natural. Once you don the Pallid Mask, he cannot even see you. Do you doubt me? You have only to look again for yourself across the Lake. Carcosa does not sit upon the Earth. It is, perhaps, not even real; or not so real

as you and I. Certainly, the Living God does not believe in it. Then why should you?

CASSILDA: You are plausible, you in your ghost face. You talk as if you know the Living God. Do you also hear the Hyades sing in the evening of the world?

STRANGER *(shortly)*: No. That is strictly the King's business. It is of no earthly interest to me.

CASSILDA *(once more recovering a bit of her aplomb)*: I daresay. How can I trust any of these answers? Do we indeed have to do nothing more to be saved than don white masks? It sounds to me like a suspiciously easy answer.

STRANGER: Test it then.

CASSILDA: And die. Thank you very much.

STRANGER: Not so fast. I would not kill you, or myself. I propose a masque, if you will pardon me the word-play. All will wear exactly what they choose, except that all will also wear the Pallid Mask. I myself shall wear the Yellow Sign, just as I do now. When you are all convinced, the masks will be doffed; and then you may announce the Succession, all in perfect safety.

CASSILDA: Oh, indeed. And then the King descends.

STRANGER: And if the King should then descend, we are all lost, and I have lost my bet. I have nothing to lose but my life. You have far more. And if the King does not descend, what then? Think! The Yellow Sign denatured, human life suddenly charged with meaning, hope flowering everywhere, the Phantom of Truth laid forever, and the Dynasty free of all fear of Carcosa and whatever monsters may live there, free of all fear of the King in Yellow and his tattered, smothering, inhuman robes!

CASSILDA: Oh Living God! How would I dare to believe you?

STRANGER: You do not dare not to…

(During this conversation, the moon has been rising slowly, contrary to the direction of sunset, and the stars fade, though they do not quite disappear. Long waves of clouds begin to pass over the surface of the Lake of Hali, which begins to sigh and heave. Spray rises. The STRANGER and CASSILDA stare at each other in a dawn and sunset of complicity and hatred.)

CASSILDA: Why would I not dare?! I, who am Cassilda, I… I, who am *me?*

STRANGER: Because, Cassilda, risk nothing, and you risk it all. That is the first law of rulership. And too, Cassilda, because in your ancient heart you love your children.

CASSILDA: Oh, you are a demon! You have found me out.

STRANGER: That is what I came for. Very well. I shall see you tomorrow, after sunset. Wear the Mask, and all eyes will be opened, all ears unstopped. Good night, my Queen.

CASSILDA: If you are human, you'll regret this.

STRANGER: Utterly. And so, good night.

(The STRANGER goes out. CASSILDA puts her hand to her head and finds that she is no longer wearing the diadem. She gropes for it, and finally locates it among the cushions. She starts to put it on, and then instead stands at the balcony rail, turning the jeweled crown in her hands. The lights go down into semidarkness.

(The fog rises in the moonlight: the stars disappear. On the horizon, seemingly afloat upon

the Lake of Hali, appear the towers of Carcosa, tall and lightless. The center of the city is behind the rising moon, which seems to be dripping silver blood into the lake.

(Enter NOATALBA.)

NOATALBA: And so, good night, my Queen. You saw him?

CASSILDA: I—think so.

NOATALBA: And—?

CASSILDA: He says—he says the King in Yellow can be blinded.

NOATALBA: And you heard him out. Now, very surely, we are indeed all mad.

(Curtain)

Act 2

(The clockwork CHILD stands before the curtain.)

CHILD: I am not the Prologue, nor the Afterword; call me the Prototaph. My role is this: to tell you it is now too late to close the book or quit the theatre. You already thought you should have done so earlier, but you stayed. How harmless it all is! No definite principles are involved, no doctrines promulgated in these pristine pages, no convictions outraged… but the blow has fallen and now it is too late. And shall I tell you where the sin lies? It is yours. You listened to us; and all the same you stay to see the Sign. Now you are ours, or, since the runes also run backwards, we are yours… forever.

(The stage falls into darkness as the curtains part. CASSILDA and CAMILLA are heard from afar)

CASSILDA *(faintly)*: That which hunts us makes us whole.

CAMILLA: Sing, Mother. Do something to stave off this melancholy.

CASSILDA: Death is a song of sorts, sung by all but once…

(After a pause, there are a few soft spare chords of music. The stage remains in darkness, the audience left alone with the voice of CASSILDA as she sings in the old ways):

CASSILDA: Along the shore the cloud waves break,
The twin suns sink behind the lake,
The shadows lengthen
In Carcosa.
Strange is the night where black stars rise,
And strange moons circle through the skies,
But stranger still is
Lost Carcosa.
Songs that the Hyades shall sing
Where flap the tatters of the King,
Must die unheard in
Dim Carcosa.
Song of my soul, my voice is dead
Die thou unsung, as tears unshed
Shall dry and die in
Lost Carcosa.[1]

(A murmur of voices and music rises under the last verse. The lights go up to reveal that the front of the stage has become a crowded ballroom, with the balcony at its back. The STRANGER and

[1] If this is the correct text of this song. All known versions are corrupted in the last verse.

nobility of Hastur are present; all the latter wear white masks with the visage of the STRANGER, to which individual taste has added grotesque variations. The result is that each mask looks like a famous person. The costumes are also various and fantastic. The STRANGER still wears the silken robe with the Yellow Sign, and CASSILDA, though masked, still wears the diadem, as does the CHILD. Many are dancing to a formal measure, something like a sarabande, something like stalking. CAMILLA is talking to the STRANGER, front left. CASSILDA watches the masque from the balcony, Carcosa and the Hyades behind her; the moon has vanished.)

STRANGER: There, Princess, you see that there has been no sending, and there will be none. The Pallid Mask is the perfect disguise.

CAMILLA: How would we know a sending if it came?

(CASSILDA descends and joins them.)

STRANGER: The messenger of the King drives a hearse.

CASSILDA: Oho, half the population of Hastur does that. It’s the city’s most popular occupation, since the siege began. All that is talk.

STRANGER: I have heard what the Talkers were talking—the talk of the beginning and the end; but I do not talk of the beginning or the end.

CAMILLA: But—the sending? Let us hear.

STRANGER: Also, the messenger of the King is a soft man. Should you greet him by the hand, some of his fingers would come off to join yours.

(CAMILLA recoils in delicate disgust. NOATALBA, circling closer and closer to the group, now joins it.)

NOATALBA: A pretty story. You seem to know everything. I think perhaps you could even tell us, given gold, the mystery of the Hyades.

STRANGER: He is King there.

NOATALBA: As everywhere. Everyone knows that.

STRANGER: He is not King in Aldebaran. That is why Carcosa was built. It is a city in exile. These two mighty stars are deep in war, like Hastur and Alar.

NOATALBA: Oh, indeed. Who then lives in Carcosa?

STRANGER: Nothing human. More than that, I cannot tell you.

NOATALBA: Your springs of invention run dry with suspicious quickness.

CASSILDA: Be silent. Stranger, how did you come by all this?

STRANGER: My sigil is Aldebaran. I hate the King.

NOATALBA: And his is the Yellow Sign, which you mock him by flaunting before the world. I tell you this: he will not be moved. He is a King whom Emperors have served; and that is why he scorns a crown. All this is in the runes.

STRANGER: There are great truths in the runes. Nevertheless, my priest, Aldebaran is his evil star. Thence comes the Pallid Mask.

NOATALBA: Belike, belike. But I would rather be deep in the cloudy depths of Dehme than to wear what you wear on your bosom. When the King opens his mantle—

(Somewhere deep in the palace, a deep-toned gong begins to strike.)

CASSILDA: Have done… Now is the time I never thought to see: I must go, and announce the Succession. Perhaps… perhaps the world itself is indeed about to begin again. How strange!

(As the gong continues to strike, everyone begins to unmask. There are murmurs and gestures of surprise, real or polite, as identities are recognized or revealed. Then there is a wave of laughter. The music becomes louder and increases in tempo.)

CAMILLA: You, sir, should unmask.

STRANGER: Indeed?

CAMILLA: Indeed, it's time. We have all laid aside disguise but you.

STRANGER: There is nothing left to shed. I wear no mask.

CAMILLA: No mask?

CASSILDA: No mask?!

STRANGER: I am the Pallid Mask itself. I am the Phantom of Truth. I came from Alar. My star is Aldebaran. Truth is our invention, it is our weapon of war. And see—by this sign we have conquered, and the siege of good and evil is ended …

(On the horizon, the towers of Carcosa begin to glow. CASSILDA sees the light first, and turns in wonder. The STRANGER has no more need to look back than an arrow has to turn back to its quiver.)

CASSILDA: *(whispering as she gazes out among the audience)*: Look, then, beyond the footlights of the moons to upturned faces, lost in wonder. Why here? Why now?

STRANGER: So they might know the joy of the author's intent. And the certainty found in an exit well deserved.

NOATALBA *(pointing)*: Look, look! Carcosa—Carcosa is on fire! Away, pale demon. Look not on our lives measured only by your profit! To wake and live is to sleep and dream, for none may say when one ends or the other begins.

(The STRANGER laughs and seizes CAMILLA by the wrists.)

CAMILLA *(in agony)*: His hands! *His hands!*

(At her cry the music dies discordantly. Then a tremendous, inhuman voice rolls from Carcosa across the Lake of Hali.)

(The STRANGER releases CAMILLA, who screams wordlessly and falls.)

THE KING: Have you found the Yellow Sign? Have you found it?

STRANGER *(shouting)*: I am the Phantom of Truth! Tremble, O King in tatters!

THE KING: The Phantom of Truth shall be laid to rest. The scalloped tatters of the King must hide Yhtill forever. As for thee, Hastur—

ALL: No! No, no!

THE KING: And as for thee, we tell thee this; it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living god.

(The STRANGER falls, and everyone else sinks slowly to the ground after him.

(THE KING can now be seen, although only faintly. He stands in state upon the balcony. He has no face, and is twice as tall as a man. He wears pointed shoes under his tattered, fantastically colored robes, and a streamer of silk appears to fall from the pointed tip of his hood. Behind his back he holds inverted a torch with a turned and jeweled shaft, which emits smoke, but no light. At times he appears to be winged; at others, haloed.

These details are for the costumer; at no time should all parts of THE KING be sufficiently visible to make them all out at once.

(Behind him, Carcosa and the Lake of Hali have vanished. Instead, there appears at his back a huge sculptured shield, in shape suggesting a labrys of onyx, upon which the Yellow Sign is embossed in gold.

(The rest of the stage darkens gradually, until, at the end, it is lit only by the rapidly decomposing body of the STRANGER, which phosphoresces bluely.)

THE KING: I have enfolded Yhtill, and the Phantom of Truth is laid. *(More quietly)*: Henceforth, the ancient lies will rule as always. … Now, Cassilda!

(CASSILDA rises mutely to her knees.)

THE KING: Though wert promised a Dynasty by Truth, and in truth shalt though have a dynasty. The Kingdom of Hastur was first in all the world, and would have ruled the world, except for this: Carcosa did not want it. Hence, thereafter, Hastur and Alar divided; but those in Alar sent you from Aldebaran the Phantom of Truth and all was lost;

together, you forgot the Covenant of the Sign. Now there is much which needs to be undone.

NOATALBA *(faintly)*: How, King, how?

THE KING: Henceforth, Hastur and Alar will be divided forever. Forever shalt thou contend for mastery, and strive in bitter blood to claim which shall be uppermost, flesh or phantom, black or white. In due course of starwheels, this strife will come to issue; but not now; oh, no, not now.

CASSILDA *(whispering)*: And—until then?

THE KING: Until then Carcosa will vanish, but my rule, I tell you now, is permanent, despite Aldebaran. Be warned. Also be promised: He who triumphs in this war shall be my—can I can honest?—inheritor, and so shall have the dynasty back. But think: Once you owned the world. The great query is, can you rule it? The query is the gift. The King in Yellow would give it into your hands again, to hold… or to let loose. Choose, terrible children.

NOATALBA *(faintly)*: You are King, and are most gracious. We thank you.

THE KING: *You* thank *me?* I am the living god! Bethink thyself, priest. There is a price, I have not as yet stated the half of it.

(Everyone waits, petrified)

THE KING: The price is: the fixing of the Mask.

(Silence.)

THE KING: You do not understand me. I will explain it once and then no more. Hastur - you acceded to, and wore, the Pallid Mask. That is the price. Henceforth, all in Hastur shall wear the Mask, and by this sign be known. And war between the masked men and the naked men shall be perpetual and bloody, until I come again… or fail to come.

(NOATALBA starts back up to his knees.)

NOATALBA: Wear the mask? We do not clothe ourselves, no. Eyes clothe us instead, casting us in our roles without permission, cruelling insisting our lives upon us. Unfair, unfair! It was Alar invented the Pallid Mask! Aldones—

THE KING: Why should I be fair? I am the living god. As for Aldones, he is the father of you all. That is my price: the fixing of the Mask. You wished to

hide yourself from my sight? Lo, I reverse the arc. The arrow pulls back in time from your death, nocked once more in the taut string which men call hate.

ALL: Oh!

CASSILDA *(bitterly)*: Not upon us, o King; not upon us!

ALL: No! Mercy! Not upon us!

THE KING: Yhtill! Yhtill! Yhtill!

(The KING vanishes, and with him his throne. The Hyades and Carcosa are once more visible over the balcony rail. The mass of corruption that had been the STRANGER rises slowly and uncertainly. The clockwork CHILD runs out from the crowd, and seizing the STRANGER by one mushy hand, leads him shambling out across the balcony in the wake of THE KING. There is a low, composite moan as they exit.)

CASSILDA *(standing and throwing her arms wide)*: Not upon us! Not upon us!

THE KING *(offstage, remote, diminishing):* What?! Did you think to be human still?

{{{GAP / DAMAGE TO MANUSCRIPT / TRANSITION}}}

(The CHILD returns on stage and draws the curtain.)

CHILD: And so we come to our end, of sorts. A play that contains multitudes: all who died, all who live, all who yet shall, upon this stage with us. Forever.